

THE
LION'S TALE

The Seasonal Magazine of St. Mark's, Mystic

Easter Sunday

Lenten Meditations 2023

**PSALMS IN THE
WILDERNESS**

Traversing the Wilderness of Lent through the Psalms

Ash Wednesday

ASH WEDNESDAY

Wednesday, February 22

by Adam Thomas

Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the seats of the scornful!
Their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and they meditate on his law day and night.

Psalm 1:1-2

Welcome to the St. Mark's Lenten Meditation guide for 2023. First off, I am so thankful for the nearly twenty parishioners who have written these reflections and shared this gift of themselves with the rest of us. Second, I must confess that these psalms were chosen in a very unscientific manner: I went through the entire Book of Psalms and picked out verses falling into three categories: (1) most well-known verses; (2) verses that show the breadth of the experiences in the book; and (3) some of my favorite verses. Third, I hope that your prayerful encounter with the psalms this Lent will be a blessing.

We begin with Psalm 1. How do these happy people manage not to walk this wicked path? They "delight" in the law of the LORD and meditate on it all the time. In other words, they strive to fill themselves with God's instruction so there's no room for scorn. Is this possible - to be completely empty of any type of sin or wickedness? No. But the striving is the important part, the intention towards goodness. And so I invite you to take this prayer of Thomas Merton's with you into this Lent:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust in you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

Thursday, February 23

by Bev Olsen

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?

Psalm 8:3-4

God called guides to lead his people to the Promised Land; God bothered Job, testing his faithfulness; God sent the prophets to speak wisdom, aware that we were lost; God sent the Son to save us all. God has been mindful of humankind; God remembers us. What are human beings, mortals to be marked and remembered by God? Who are we to be visited by the almighty? Do we take this for granted? Have we squandered the gift of creation? Do we squander the gift of salvation and the resurrection? Have I become complacent? Am I listening for a call? Do I remember that God has marked each us as his own? Do I remember? Or have I bought into the culture? Do I believe that everyone should be mindful of me? Read my tweets and Facebook posts, hear my story? Am I speaking so loudly I can't hear the other voices? Do I believe I am large and important? Do I live as if I am royalty in my own universe? Or do I remember, as I look at creation, that I am small? Do I remember that time defeats us all, for we are dust and to dust we shall return. Do I remember this gift of being known even in my smallness?

Friday, February 24

by Ted Kietzman

How long, O LORD?
will you forget me for ever?
how long will you hide your face from me?

Psalm 13:1

Tyre Nichols was beaten so badly on January 7, 2023 by Memphis police officers that he died three days later. Shortly before he became unconscious from the beating, he called out in his anguish for his mom. This might seem peculiar to you, it is not. It is common for soldiers on the battlefield to call for their mothers when they have been mortally wounded. It is often their last call for help before they expire. Imagine Tyre's mom watching the video. Imagine her emotional response when she sees her son call out to her.

How do you think our loving God responds to the anguish of the psalmist in this verse? Is it crazy to think that in our darkest anguish that God feels our pain? That he is with us? That he loves us so that sometimes his heart breaks for us?

Monday, February 27

by Katy Roberts

You will show me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy,
and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Psalm 16:11

Psalm 16 is titled: *Conserva me, Domine* which can be translated as "Save me, Lord."

As we reflect at Lent, how much focus do we put on heaven? This psalm speaks to us in beautiful promises, "fullness of joy," "pleasures evermore." Truly this must be heaven? Jesus after suffering on the cross and rising again gives us our salvation. Salvation is just another derivative of "Save Me." Did the crowd not jeer at Jesus as he hung on the cross? In the Gospel of Matthew (NIV 27:40) the crowd says, "You who are to destroy the temple and build it in three days. save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

Lent leads us to the beauty of knowing the end of the story, Jesus does in fact, Save Us. Psalm 16 shows us that the heaven that Jesus saved "US" for is without question a splendid place.

Tuesday, February 28

by Bob Welt

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my
heart be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

Psalm 19:14

One of my favorite editions of the Bible is the Oxford Study Edition of The New English Bible. This edition translates the verse as: "May all that I say and think be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my rock and redeemer." In a footnote for this citation, the editor states, "Man, even when inspired and guided, may still sin. Hence, the worshiper asks forgiveness of God."

Many years ago, I was part of a small prayer group at Fitch Junior High. There were four of us: Mike, a Roman Catholic; George, an Episcopalian; and Ella, a conservative Baptist, who as she often reminded us, had one of the world's brightest young granddaughters. We three males tended to be somewhat brief in our prayers, whereas Ella was loquacious. I used to joke that I hoped the good Lord had his steno pad ready when Ella began to ask for His help, guidance, or blessings on any number of people or situations. However, none of us ever questioned her sincerity and I am certain that her meditations were acceptable in the Lord's sight.

Wednesday, March 1

by Alison Ives

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.
He revives my soul
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

Psalm 23:1-3

I am no longer alone, feeling abandoned, living in fear and uncertainty. I am beloved, cherished and cared for. I am blessed by abundance and lack for nothing I truly need. I am safe in His arms, under the shadow of His wing, in the palm of His hand. He has promised to be with me always. The beauty of His creation in nature is a great delight. I rejoice in it. I am in awe of its majesty, its power both during the storm and in the quiet afterwards. When I am confused and have lost my way, I ask for help and am guided back into the light of His love. I ask for forgiveness and redirection. I feel at peace and am comforted. For His way is the way of love. For His Name's sake we commit ourselves to reflecting His love in the way we choose to live our lives. Compassion, acceptance, listening, affirming, respect, kindness and generosity are fruits of the spirit we have been graced with. For His name's sake, we are asked to share His gifts with all people in the name of His Love, so everyone may come to know that peace and light filled way of life.

Thursday, March 2

by Faithe Emerich

One thing have I asked of the LORD; one thing I seek;
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life.

Psalm 27:4

My eight-year-old son still has a stash of candy that he received on Valentines day from his school mates. He approached me after breakfast one morning just as I had begun to respond to a few emails on my computer. I could tell he had rehearsed his request in advance: "I've eaten all my breakfast... including my eggs! Can I have a tootsie roll from my Valentine's candy bag?"

I brushed aside the "should nots" of parenting that told me that kids "should not" have candy in the morning and instead gave in to my eagerness to have a few more quiet moments to finish my email - of which this candy consumption time would guarantee. "OK," I said. "Just one piece." As he headed out the doorway of our living room to retrieve his candy, he mumbled, "Oh, OK. I'll pick the Snickers bar then." Now, in the candy economy of Halloween, Easter and Valentines, a tootsie roll is equivalent to 10 cents and a Snickers bar... at least a dollar! He nearly increased his candy pay load by 10 times with that mumble! I quickly reminded him that I agreed to him eating a Tootsie Roll - not a Snickers bar - and off he went.

The reason I mention this story is that this passage from the Psalms reminds me of my son's request. The psalmist says, "I only have one request! Only one thing I want!" God then responds, "Sure! You may have one thing... what is it, kiddo?" The psalmist replies, "I only wish to be with you - always!" He could have asked for safety, for wealth, for success. But instead, he felt that being in the presence of God was greater than it all. I admit that my analogy is a bit weak, but I think's wonderful to connect our idea of God with an extra dash everyday ordinariness in which true intimacy grows. And I think God, as intimate parent, is a wonderful way to read these verses.

Friday, March 3

by Adam Thomas

Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
in you have I trusted all the day long.

Psalm 25:3-4

How do we learn God's ways? Through prayer, worship, reading and reflecting on scripture, and (and this is the big one) by modeling our lives on those special people who are fully alive in their walks with God. For me, this was a woman at Trinity Episcopal Church in Martinsburg, WV. Her name was Ruby, and I wrote a whole book about her because she meant so much to me. Ruby taught me God's ways by being fully herself. She loved the people around her, cared for them with quiet devotion, and spoke the truth in love at all times. She played hymns on the piano, "making" up the hard parts of the music. When she arrived at her husband's hospital room, she knew God was already present there, and this she asserted in her understated way. I learned so much about the ways of God from Ruby, but the most important thing I learned was this: love is the way.

Monday, March 6

by Ted Kietzman

You have turned my wailing into dancing;
you have put off my sack-cloth and clothed me with joy.
Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing;
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks for ever.

Psalm 30:12-13

The Greek Stoics and followers of Buddha have one perspective in common. It is that we feel joy when our expectations for what is happening are exceeded. And, when what is happening is less than what we were expecting we suffer. Their conclusion is to manage our expectations. This is hard for me to do. My default setting is to take so many things for granted, and notice things that I think I deserve that I'm not getting, so I "suffer" frequently. This is kind of surprising since you'd think a white, male, straight, well-off, well-educated, healthy, and OK looking person would have tons of joy and minimal suffering. The Joni Mitchell lyric, "You don't know what you've got till it's gone" is on my mind. I'm trying hard to notice and be grateful for so many things in my life before they go. And I've gotten to the age that I understand everything will go eventually, except for one thing, the love of God.

Tuesday, March 7

by Teresa Norris

Taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are they who trust in God!

Psalm 34:8

When first presented with this verse for reflection, I'll admit I wasn't thrilled. Although I do say it regularly, when I do it's at face value. "Taste and see how good is the Lord," I say while offering a freshly baked piece of communion bread to my husband. (Yes I do this, and until you've had it warm with melting butter, don't judge.)

That is the literal interpretation; to go deeper I had to do a little Bible-Googling, and I'm glad I did. There I got more depth to the term "taste" and gave more thought to what it means to me. Have you ever offered some food to someone who is reluctant to receive it? "Taste it," you might say, "Try it at least." To taste something is to get personal, it's maybe even risky; and this is what we're invited to do when we encounter God. The result we're told is simple -- we'll find the Lord is good and those who take refuge in him will be happy, blessed, and safe.

Again, when first approaching Psalm 34:8, I wanted instead to skip up to verse 4, one of my favorites. "I sought the Lord and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears." I love this verse so much, that when it first hit me in the heart, I painted it on wood for myself, my mother, and my godmother. It is the scriptural summary of how I came to know Jesus a half century ago.

Now upon reflection with the verse I was assigned, I can say that I am glad I tasted and saw how good the Lord is -- literally and figuratively. For when we take that taste and take that risk of surrendering, God does indeed answer us in the midst of our fears. And his answer is always, "Yes, I'm right here."

Wednesday, March 8

Into your hands I commend my spirit,
for you have redeemed me, O LORD, O God of truth..

Psalms 31:5

by Faithe Emerich

As Jesus hung on the cross and took his final breath, he quoted the words from this Psalm saying "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!" What would Jesus have taught about this particular passage from the Psalms? While we have no record that he taught on this passage, I wonder what he would have taught if he did. Would he have begun his teaching as he did so many of them... "you have heard it said...(insert the well-known Bible passage here), but I tell you...(insert Jesus' *new* way of seeing this passage here)". I wish I could know how he came to understand this passage and why he chose to utter it with his last breath of life. Someday in the heaven-lived life, perhaps I'll ask him. But for now, I can know something very important by understanding this teaching pattern of his: that whatever is regarded as "the way it is" to his students, he will urge them to question their own thoughts about that "way". Understanding this, I can ask myself..."of what am I so certain, that questioning it never occurs to me?" It's in this inquiry of my own certainty where, redemption from error arises and invites me to a holy encounter with the God of truth.

Thursday, March 9

As the deer longs for the water-brooks,
so longs my soul for you, O God.
My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God;
when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?

Psalms 42:1-2

by Susan Kietzman

Like the deer, my thirst for God is inherent in my daily life. I marvel at God's dawn on my early morning walks. I hear God's voice in the honk of the Canada goose flying above me. I feel God's power in the winter wind stinging my cheeks. It's quiet and peaceful at the advent of day. In this moment, the living God is all around me, there for the taking - always ready, always available. My response to God, like the deer, can be automatic. The deer drinks, without thinking, to sustain its body. I do so, too, to expand my soul.

Friday, March 10

Be still, then, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth.

Psalms 46:11

by Maggy Gilbert

The first time I heard a waiter ask if I wanted "still water" I was puzzled. I'm not accustomed to fancy restaurants. To me, drinking water comes in two varieties: bubbly or tap. Still waters denote calm. They run deep. Bottled at "sources," and costing up to hundreds of dollars a liter, they are not.

We live with the Mystic River out our back door. On calm days gazing at it brings me peace, though I am aware that its unruffled surface masks teeming life beneath its broad expanse. I especially enjoy my still water when I am kayaking.

I used to think the only way to know God was to sit still in my chair with a candle lit. And yes, that remains my go-to means many times. However, I find that when I am on the river, the repetition of the paddling motion, the slurps and swirling eddies left behind, put me in a meditative state where I can be still and know. It's a deeply meaningful time. But I am not alone. I have taped the names of many friends and loved ones on the bow of my kayak so they too can experience this stillness. It's my way of praying for them. The list keeps growing.

My heart fills as I am cradled by the water and surrounded by God's beauty of sky and clouds. I drift and lean back, facing the sun, to let my soul swell with God's love. My automatic response, prompted by Spirit I'm sure, is one of praise and thanksgiving. (continued)

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I

Be still and know that

Be still and know

Be still and

Be still

Be

Monday, March 13

by Zach Kohl

I found the context of this verse helpful in reflecting on what the Psalmist is saying in Psalm 50:

"O my people, listen as I speak. Here are my charges against you, O Israel: I am God, your God! I have no complaint about your sacrifices or the burnt offerings you constantly offer. But I do not need the bulls from your barns or the goats from your pens. For all the animals of the forest are mine, and I own the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird on the mountains, and all the animals of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for all the world is mine and everything in it. Do I eat the meat of bulls? Do I drink the blood of goats? Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High. Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory." (Verses 7-15 from the New Living Translation)

Without context, Psalm 50:7 appears to seek a thanksgiving sacrifice: an offering made because there is a reason to be thankful. But context (and a clearer translation) make evident, that it is a thankful heart that is the sacrifice. For me, that is harder to offer. It would be easier to offer a physical sacrifice than a change of heart. To be thankful, I have to pay attention to what God has done for me and provided me. I have to look at what others have done for me. It is easy to take these things for granted, which is what I think I do. I must find a way to rest in thankfulness for what I've been given while not allowing the temptation of always wanting more to take hold. Amen.

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and make good your vows to the Most High.

Psalm 50:14

Tuesday, March 14

by Bob Welt

The author of the quoted verse was writing a lament, which the author of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* describes as a "prayer for healing and moral renewal." The original ancient writer realized that we all sin, and recognizing that, that we all should ask for forgiveness. I remember bringing Communion to a person who always recited the Lord's Prayer as "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us," from the New Living Translation. I remember reading in *"The Anglican Digest"* many years ago the story of a bishop who had come to confirm a group of young people. The bishop asked the youngsters questions about the church. Coming to one girl, he pointed to himself and said, "What am I?" The flustered teen could only remember one line she had learned from her catechism, "You're a miserable sinner," to which the clergyman replied, "Indeed I (continued)

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:11

am, my child. Indeed I am.” What is frightening is that there are those who don’t recognize that they have sinned. I remember an incident in which a middle school girl had her cell phone stolen. The assistant principal was able to determine the culprit and called her home. Her mother’s response was that she would return the phone because her daughter wasn’t able to get the charger, so it was useless.

Wednesday, March 15

by Mike Sobol

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful,
for I have taken refuge in you;
in the shadow of your wings will I take refuge
until this time of trouble has gone by.

Psalm 57:1

The whole of Psalm 57 is written while David is hiding in a cave from Saul who is trying to kill him. While I fortunately can’t empathize with that experience, life, at times, has backed me into a corner. And in those moments, the survival instincts kick in; often we fight, plead for help from the attackers, or accept defeat. Yet here, David turns to God, for His mercy. And by the end of Psalm 57, he is praising God and thanking him for his love.

Today, the piece that stands out to me in this psalm is that God is the lens through which David interacts with life. David is being hunted and asks for mercy...from God. David places his trust for rescue...in God. David stops focusing on his own circumstances to praise...God.

I think of how and when I interact with God in the day to day. Often, I fit God into my schedule. I am challenged to evolve my perspective to allow God to be the primary influencer in all I see and do. With these “God-glasses”, I have to imagine my interactions with the world would be dramatically enhanced.

Lord, we thank you and pray for your mercy. May we always seek to make you the lens through which we see others and the world around us. Amen.

Thursday, March 16

by Jaye Lyon

For God alone my soul in silence waits;
truly, my hope is in God.

Psalm 62:6

When I think about all the spiritual gifts I have received along my faith journey, Silence stands out as the most significant by far. An appreciation for the Psalms and the power of Silence came from choosing the way of Benedictine Spirituality. What I came to understand is that Mystics of all the major faith traditions encourage and teach different meditation practices in order that we may learn to “wait in silence for God alone.” Now the inner silence alluded to here is not the absence of noise any more than true peace (Shalom) is the absence of conflict. Our culture sees silence as counterintuitive and we are continually bombarded by noise, filling all space with words and visual distractions. The truth I have discovered: just as we have the spark of Divine Light within us which can never be extinguished, so too we have the intuition to listen for the still small voice of God within. In Silence we let God love us specifically. God’s love is not filtered through scripture or tradition. Silence is a transformative and redemptive power for our soul. So often we see and hear the awe and wonder of God in the natural landscape or in other creatures. Can you imagine experiencing this wondrous voice from within? What would you hear?

Some years ago, I hit a wall of personal despair. I had agreed to move a thousand miles from home for 4 months to care for the first-born child of a young couple in our extended family. Ellie was born with significant heart defects. She needed to be isolated and cared for until medically ready for lifesaving open heart surgery. Doing this made perfect sense to me...or so I thought. I am a social worker by profession, who has provided care to families and children in crisis. However, during my first week a wall of despair was built quickly brick by brick. I realized I did not have the necessary skills to care for an infant as fragile and medically compromised

as Ellie. I did not have the emotional strength either. High anxiety at the thought of Ellie dying while in my care was the heaviest brick in my wall. So, very early Sunday morning I went to a church in this new city to pray. I went for Silence, solitude and stillness. I went filled with deep despair to prepare myself to tell Ellie's parents I would be leaving and why I had decided this was the reasonable thing to do. I felt a tremendous sense of failure and sadness for letting my beloved family down.

The bricks in my wall were no match for the power of Silence, the power of Grace, and the power of the voice of God within. Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Chattanooga was founded in 1853. It is also made of bricks and has a stunningly huge beautiful altar. The altar is framed by the well-known image of Jesus surrounded by children. From within I heard- "I have Ellie, she is mine, you need only to love her." On the altar was a huge display of flowers. That morning all were bright white aside from the center, which held sunflowers (my favorite flower). My home kitchen is decorated with sunflowers. I heard- "You can create home here, in this unfamiliar place, you need only to love this family." I felt the peace that passes all understanding enfold me, the anxiety and fear was gone. A door appeared in my wall; the KEY was trust. There was an immediate understanding of the need to get out of my own way and give all of the responsibility I was carrying to God. My judgment cleared, the call was to live into more unity of belief and behavior, to love and to serve. I remembered the spiritual tools I had learned of detachment and one pointed attention, which would help me support this family. Caring for Ellie involved both physically and emotionally exhausting days, the need to learn challenging skills far outside my comfort zone and many health crises. I never wavered in my decision to stay and I never lost hope. I always had the key in my pocket! The experience was luminous. Two years later I returned to care for Ellie through more open heart procedures. The Miracle of Ellie is 4 Open Heart surgeries before she was 3yrs old! She is 8yrs old now, bright, beautiful and doing well. Grace continues to pour into my life from the gift of loving in Chattanooga.

It is hard to find words that adequately honor Silence as the most sacred of spiritual practices. In Silence, we find deep wisdom resources of Great Holy Spirit. We find what we need to keep the light within us burning brightly on days when it's just barely a flicker. We find rest (Sabbath rest) from the cultural reality of darkness and gloom. We are reminded that God was, is, and will always be God. Always imagining, creating, sustaining and loving us very specifically and our world. This is the source of our hope!

Friday, March 17

by Alison Ives

I have come into deep waters,
and the torrent washes over me.
I have grown weary with my crying;
my throat is inflamed;
my eyes have failed from looking for my God.

Psalm 69:3-4

There have been times in my life when God has felt very distant, present only in the faith that somehow has sustained me. "God love Me", is a short prayer that came to me during a difficult, protracted time, not too long ago. We all have experienced times when God has been seemingly absent and yet so longed for. Getting through hard times for me has often had a surreal feeling of weight and a strange unfamiliar sense of place. Where am I? This image of a torrent washing over me has elicited a visceral remembrance of different events from the past. How does one ever get through those days when God seems absent? Except, I believe God is not really absent at all. I was prayed for and supported by family and friends. In the stress of unfamiliar difficulties, perhaps my awareness of His presence was blunted. It is hard to imagine having a throat inflamed from crying out, eyes blinded from staring into the empty darkness and God being not present. Perhaps all my inner noise and emotional thrashing about made it all but impossible for me to see or hear anything but my own misery? "Be still and know that I am God." In the deep breath of seeking a release from anxiety, calming a racing mind can bring a quiet where God's voice is able to be heard and I remember "This too shall pass". In the meantime, God is present, we are sent to each other through Him to offer comfort, solace, solidarity and acceptance, hopefully leading us to a place of peace.

Monday, March 20

by Barbara Barrett

How dear to me is your dwelling, O LORD of hosts!
My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of The LORD;
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.
The sparrow has found her a house
and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young;
by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

Psalm 84:1-2

It took me a while to get into the Lord's dwelling place. When I was growing up in the small town of Oquossoc, Maine, I would pass by the big Roman Catholic church with the stained glass windows and wonder what went on in there. I knew it was something mysterious. Other people went in, but my family did not. Even then I had a "desire and longing for the courts of the LORD." Finally someone invited me to church when I was eleven years old, not into the church with the stained glass windows, but into the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. Once in, I never looked back. The church called a wonderful young rector, and we formed an active youth group. I loved everything about that youth group, from the Lenten weekly service before school to eucharist celebrated on the shore of a remote lake. Doug and I were married in that church and even brought our first two babies back there, back to the nest, to be baptized.

During my college years in Boston, I sought out different churches in which to worship on Sundays. The church has been my anchor, the place where I know how to be, safe in the courts of the LORD.

When we moved to Mystic in 2002, the first thing we did was look for a church, a new spiritual dwelling. We found St. Mark's and found our friends with whom we experience God. I continue to rejoice and be thankful.

Tuesday, March 21

by Teresa Norris

Because he is bound to me in love, therefore will I deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my Name.
He shall call upon me, and I will answer him;
I am with him in trouble; I will rescue him and bring him to honor.

Psalm 91:14-15

The 91st Psalm has been my favorite for decades. I can remember when my children were young, ushering them to the sofa during a lightning storm, the Bible in my hand. I'd turn to Psalm 91 and read it aloud, reminding them that God promises to be with us in every situation, protecting us from harm. At some point I felt these assurances as outlined in Psalm 91 were so precious and personal, I turned the bulk of them around just a bit, having them reflect this impression. Then I committed this adaptation to memory. In times of stress (e.g., a doctor's waiting room, a sleepless night), these words run through my mind:

Because I have made the Lord my refuge, the Most High my habitation, No evil shall befall me, no scourge come near my tent. For he has given his angels charge of me, to guard me in all my ways. On their hands they will bear me up, lest I dash my foot against a stone. I will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent I will trample underfoot. Because I cleave to him in love, he will deliver me; he will protect me because I know his name. When I call on him, he will answer me; he will be with me in trouble. He will rescue me and honor me. With long life he will satisfy me and show me his salvation.

The psalm reminds me of God's presence and love. The words settle into my soul and bring me comfort. Such is the gift God's Word is to all of us. A love letter from a parent to a child. "I will be with you always." It sort of blows my mind.

Wednesday, March 22

by Zach Kohl

Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the whole earth.
Sing to the LORD and bless his Name;
proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.

Psalms 96:1-2

I must admit that I usually lack this exuberance in my spiritual life. It might be that I make a better Episcopalian than I did an Evangelical. But that is a fallacy. I, as an Episcopalian, should still be a little “e” evangelical. Our view of the Triune God and our faith tradition offer a grounded, connected, life-giving, and truly open faith that is distinct. It might be out of character for me to sing it on the street corner but I can proclaim the good news in ways that are authentic to me: with family and friends, in one on one encounters, when the moment calls for it.

Thursday, March 23

by Doug Barrett

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.
As a father cares for his children,
so does the LORD care for those who fear him.
For he himself knows whereof we are made;
he remembers that we are but dust.

Psalms 103:12-14

How do we know just how far the east is from the west? If we contemplate that thought for a few moments I believe we may come to the realization that it is an infinite distance. God’s love for us is also infinite. There is a catch! We are required to open our hearts and minds to accept the endless love God shines on us.

I often find God’s love through people, sometimes it is a person I love and respect and other times a stranger. Many years ago, my family and I were at a church service in Norwich, CT. A baby was crying, and the mom was not having any success calming the infant. The dad picked up the distressed child and walked to the back of the church and began to slowly pace back and forth ever so quietly. The priest noticed the dad and the little one. He paused the service for a long moment and said “That is God’s work in the world”. I was struck by God’s love for that child, the dad and all that were there.

Recently, I had the opportunity to spend time with a sick parishioner. During the hours I was with him I could feel the presence of God’s love shining through. It was an amazing moment in my life. Truly, it was a peaceful and humbling time that God revealed his infinite love to me.

Friday, March 24

by Susan Kietzman

O LORD, how manifold are your works! in wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the great and wide sea with its living things too many to number,
creatures both small and great.
There move the ships, and there is that Leviathan,
which you have made for the sport of it.

Psalms 104:25-27

One of my favorite places to walk is Napatree Point. I monitor the tidal chart, waiting for a low tide/sunny day combination that suits my schedule. At the top of the sand dune approaching the beach I can see the Atlantic stretched out from the shoreline to the horizon. What is it about this vista that always catches my breath? It’s partly the “great and wide sea.” It’s also partly my sense of insignificance in the grand scheme of things. When I walk that beach, looking out at the water, my worries fade, my perspective shifts. The ocean breeze clears my mind, swells my heart, and fills my lungs with salty hope.

Monday, March 27

by Ann Ragsdale

My heart is firmly fixed, O God, my heart is fixed;
I will sing and make melody.
Wake up, my spirit; awake, lute and harp;
I myself will waken the dawn.
I will confess you among the peoples, O LORD;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.

Psalm 108:1-3

Below is an echoing of the Psalmist's feelings as they connected to many of us who watched that awful morning as Notre Dame went up in flames. May it remind us of how we rebuild again.

When Notre Dame burned
That awful sunrise, thousands came,
The river Seine and soft wind telling
The promise of faith endures;
Symbols of hope we could not see
For faith, for doubt
For silence or song
So may we also
Rise

Tuesday, March 28

by Arlene Johnson

Who is like the LORD our God, who sits enthroned on high,
but stoops to behold the heavens and the earth?
He takes up the weak out of the dust and lifts up the poor from the ashes.

Psalm 113:5-7

This psalm asks and then reminds us there is no one and nothing exactly like or greater than God, and that he is, above all things. For that reason we should always give him the praise and honor due him. As I start and end each day I try to take a few minutes to reflect upon all the blessings I have, even the smallest ones (like waking up), and give him thanks and praise for them. It's a small thing to do, and it helps me give my day direction.

This passage also says God is humble in the sense that even though he is above all things, he is always there watching over all of us. We believe God is constantly there beside us as we travel through our lives, and that he will never abandon us as we go through our life's trials. We know if we reach out to him during those most difficult times, he will be by our side to give us hope, comfort, and strength as we confront our obstacles. For me, knowing he is there enables me to be stronger when I have to deal with things I myself, or my family, and friends have to face in our lives. God is especially caring for those poor and underprivileged members of society who need his help. We know he will not forget them when he comes again. I feel it's important for us to try to aid and assist those people, who are less fortunate, whenever we can.

Wednesday, March 29

by Adam Thomas

Your word is a lantern to my feet
and a light upon my path.

Psalm 119:105

One of my favorite images of the life of faith is the metaphor of headlights. Night falls and fog descends, and you have to drive home. The roads are dark, the way circuitous. The headlights of the car do not shine on your house. They shine on the small patch of road right in front of you. Yet, somehow you make it home. That's the life of faith. We follow Jesus, walking his Way of Love. The path before us is illuminated, not the destination. And yet, somehow we will make it home.

Thursday, March 30

by Sue Glass

I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?
My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth.
The LORD shall watch over your going out and your coming in,
from this time forth for evermore.

Psalm 121:1-2, 8

I have spent many happy moments "lifting my eyes to the hills" at our house in the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. Our elevation was 3,500 feet, with an uninterrupted view of Mount Mitchell, which at 6,600 feet is the highest mountain in the U.S. east of the Rockies. I always came away from that quiet time feeling renewed, refreshed, and in total awe of the majesty before me. I had no doubts as to where my help came from.

My husband's physical condition deteriorated rapidly, we moved to StoneRidge in Mystic to be near family and to have the care available that we might need, and I had so many doubts it came close to being overwhelming. Then, as Covid was rearing its nasty head, I went to the Ash Wednesday service at StoneRidge in 2020, and once again began to realize the truth spoken in these final four lines. Through the Adult Forum and church services via Zoom I began to be drawn into the St. Mark's family and feel that I was being "watched over."

This was all confirmed in a major fashion when my husband passed away in September, and I felt the love "for this time forth and forevermore."

Lastly, I will be serving on the vestry for the next three years, and I look forward to being a part of that love. Praise be to God.

Friday, March 31

by Kieran Geoghegan

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."
Now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Psalm 122:1-2

In the immortal words of Homer Simpson, "Weaseling out of things is important to learn. It's what separates us from the animals (except the weasel)."

There are Sunday mornings when I can think of something else to do besides going to church. Like nothing. Or taking a walk. Or watching soccer on TV. But, usually, an inner voice moves my feet and calls me to make my way to Pearl Street, where the warmth of St Mark's awaits. The high road or the low road? Up the concrete steps to the blood-red doors, a friendly welcome from the usher, and into our beautifully modest place of prayer. Or, to escape monotony, into the Undercroft, up the narrow stairs, an apprehensive eye for casualties in the mousetraps, and arrival topside.

If God is everywhere and always with us, why do we need to be together? The answer lies in the question.

We **need** to be together. We just do. For sharing of joy, sharing of sorrow, sharing of worry, sharing of hope, sharing of prayer, sharing of work, sharing of learning and commitment. And, in sharing, we do each of these things far better together than we can manage them alone.

Each of us must find the kind of prayer that we are good at. None of us is good at all of them. Some of them I can't do at all, but I rest easier knowing that I am part of a body of souls in which a broad spectrum of prayer is framed. And so, I am glad when they say to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

Monday, April 3

by Sheri Pellerin

Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed,
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

Psalm 126:6-7

Breaking down this Psalm there are two main timeframes. The first is a period of hardship to the point of tears. Emotional suffering, physical pain, intense disappointment over our present situation can all cause tears. In effect, those tears could serve as a protector between our eyes and the rest of our physical, emotional, and spiritual worlds. What we see, our perception of our surroundings, changes when our eyes are full of tears causing us to not see clearly. Tears that strong can sometimes blind us. Could the root cause be our self-centered desire to be the one in control so that when we are not our frustration manifests itself into tears?

The second period of time is one of great joy. The burdens we had previously felt are now easily carried on our shoulders. So what changed? How did we go from suffering to joy? Some researchers conclude that tears are often self-soothing, releasing chemicals that make us feel better, easing our physical and emotional pain and promoting a sense of well-being. As Christians we believe the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of tears which help us communicate with God. Frustration turns to tears, tears can be blinding thus causing us to turn introspective, and introspection can open us up to a better understanding of God's plan for our lives. When we release ourselves to God we are relieved of the burden we've been shouldering that has caused us the hardship in the first place. Whether real or imagined our tears-producing circumstances can bring us into a closer walk with God.

Tuesday, April 4

by Katy Roberts

Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice;
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.
I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope.
My soul waits for the LORD, more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

Psalm 130:1, 4-5

The phrase that sparks my imagination and reflection in this portion of Psalm 130 is "Lord, hear my voice." When we are in community, we say our prayers out loud together and our voices together are a beautiful thing. Most evenings as my family and I say our prayers at bedtime and we cannot seem to get all of us in the same room, we pronounce to pray from where you are, and in loud voices, we pray together. "Lord, hear my voice."

The moments of personal prayer are quieter. My faith tells me, God hears my voice then too. As verse 5 begins "My soul waits for the Lord." In the BCP page 363 and most of all the Holy Eucharist versions, we say something like this: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." As each passage reflects upon one another, my reflection is "Christ waits for (my soul) me." Lent gives us the opportunity to welcome Christ as a living part of our lives. Amen.

Wednesday, April 5

by Faithe Emerich

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept,
when we remembered you, O Zion.
As for our harps, we hung them up on the trees in the midst of that land.

Psalm 137:1-2

The Kingdom of Judah was conquered by Babylon in 597 BCE and its inhabitants taken into exile after their most sacred temple - the temple built by King Solomon - was destroyed. What sorrow must attend those who lose their homeland and sacred traditions at the hands of oppressors. This kind of story is not unique to the Jewish people, although they have suffered this same tragedy many times at many different oppressors hands. When we hear of those being exiled from their homeland by either oppressor or natural disaster as of late, how can we mourn with them? Can we set aside our tools of entertainment and joy for a time and weep with them "by the waters of Babylon"? How can we let them know that we remember with them?

Thursday, April 6

by Pam Allen

The words of this Psalm leave me in a place of mystery and awe. To live in mystery is to be open to wonder and questioning. God has been in a deep relationship with me even before my conception. His discovery is constant and nothing separates us. He is my Beloved and I am his. It is a wordless communion. It's that which gives me protection. There is an intimacy too deep for words and it is both reassuring and transforming. It takes time for this to happen. I have treasured the stillness (holiness) over time and continually need to be aware of my need of rest and stillness in the form of pausing throughout the day. To be in being has no words. When I pray the Holy Spirit teaches me. God is mysteriously hidden in my true self. In my longing God is longing for me. From Gunilla Norris's book, *Embracing the Seasons*, she writes "Our mandate in life is to become all that we can be. That becoming is ultimately not for ourselves but for the common good and for life itself." We are living in a time of great uncertainty and a journey where we can be together in community. I am filled with gratitude. In closing I would like to share a poem with you written by Denise Levertov. Her words have deeply inspired me.

LORD, you have searched me out and known me;
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You trace my journeys and my resting-places
and are acquainted with all my ways.

Psalm 139:1-2

The Avowal

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.

-DENISE LEVERTOV

Friday, April 7

by Adam Thomas

These are the opening words of Psalm 22, the very words that Jesus cries out while dying on the cross. Scholars have debated down through history if Jesus "actually" said this or if quoting Psalm 22 was a handy way for the Gospel writers to comment on the event of crucifixion from within the narrative. Now, I don't particularly find it helpful trying to guess which words in the Gospel Jesus really said, so I'm going to go with a little of Column A and a little of Column B. The story of the Passion remembers Jesus crying these words. They are, at the same time, words of utter desolation (as would befit anyone being tortured to death) and words that (through the vehicle of the rest of psalm) point to the hope of God being fulfilled at long last. Psalm 22 is a brutal, painful psalm to say aloud for most of its length.

But about two-thirds of the way in, the psalm turns. The sense of abandonment gives way to a remembrance of God's promises. The psalmist who cried out about being forsaken says, "My soul shall live for [God]; my descendants shall serve [God]; they shall be known as the LORD'S for ever." How can the psalmist say this after the first two-thirds? It all hinges on the word "shall." This is a word, like "will," that is a future tense word. The psalmist projects their pain into the future and finds God there. This is our hope: that in times of trial we remember that we remain with God, walking together even when we feel forsaken. My spiritual director in seminary once said, "I know you can imagine many futures, but God is only in the one that is going to happen."

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
and are so far from my cry
and from the words of my distress?

Psalm 22:1

THE LION'S TALE

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
15 Pearl Street
Mystic, CT 06355

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Greg Steel
Jackie Stoltz
Dave Tura
Fred Zielger

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All members of the congregation
The Rev. Adam Thomas, Rector
David Tubbs, Music Director
Faihe Emerich, Communications
Ted Kietzman, Senior Warden
Rob Christian, Junior Warden
Christian Cloutier, Clerk
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